

Helen Keller Visits
Haifa, Israel
by
Sonya S. Cohen

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HELEN KELLER VISITS HAIFA, ISRAEL

By SONYA SIMON COHEN

CERTAIN experiences encountered in life are of such magnitude that you feel not only that you will never forget them, but that the experience itself was almost divinely inspired. Such a privilege was granted to the students and staff of the Institute for the Deaf in Haifa, Israel, on Thursday, May 29, 1952, with a visit from Miss Helen Keller.

The Institute for the Deaf is a modern oral school of forty-five children divided into three groups. The kindergarten has twenty children, the lower grades, aged 6-9, contain twelve children, and there are thirteen boys and girls in the senior group. Our staff consists of the founder and director, Dr. A. Zaliouk, a teacher for each group, two assistants in the kindergarten, a teacher-in-training, and a speech therapist. The children also receive courses in art, gardening, sewing, and carpentry (at a nearby trade school) weekly, besides their regular school subjects. Dr. Zaliouk, besides directing the activities of the school, conducts a weekly class with the senior group in rhythmic speech, acoustic training and speech improvement. He recently introduced the tactile method of Erwin Kern* with slight variations of his own, for the improvement of rhythmic speech. The staff have found this experiment to be working rather favorably, with the children grasping its possibilities quite readily, and showing an improvement in stress, rhythm, and control of pitch. This tactile method because of its subjectivity is used by all children regardless of their hearing loss, in correcting and improving their own voice placement and rhythm of speech. The staff therefore was quite interested in watching Miss Keller's use of the tactile method and in listening to her speak.

The older children of our school when they read of Miss Keller's anticipated visit to Israel began to question their teachers: "How does she manage to travel?", "Can she read and write?", "Does she speak?", and "Will she come to visit us?" Up to this time they had had no contact with the



MISS KELLER RECEIVES A SCROLL WITH A BIBLICAL QUOTATION.

blind except for people they had seen in the streets with seeing-eye dogs, or being led. Their teacher then told the class of Miss Keller's life and the study of Braille. Ruth, one of the girls, volunteered the fact that she had just received Helen Keller's autobiography (translated into Hebrew) as a birthday gift and that she would bring it to class. When the rest of the pupils heard that Miss Keller was an author, it was almost too much for them to comprehend. For days afterwards they were questioning the staff, "You mean that she can really write books too?" Once Miss Keller arrived in Israel, they followed the newspaper accounts of her travels eagerly and brought the articles to class for discussion.

When we were sure that Helen Keller would be visiting our school, the beginners' class was told about her and her impending arrival. The children sat in rapt attention during the entire explanation, mouths agape and eyes staring directly at their teacher (I have never before seen these boisterous youngsters sitting so attentively).

When their teacher completed her explanation some of them got up from their seats, closed their eyes and started trying to feel their way around the classroom and

*Hago, Hans. Die Sprachanbildung bei Taubstummer auf gansheitlicher Grundlage. Pro Infirmis, N. 3-4, Zurich 1951/52.



HELEN KELLER AND POLLY THOMSON, WITH SOME OF THE STAFF AND STUDENTS AT THE INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF, HAIFA, ISRAEL, MAY 29, 1952. "THE LITTLE KINDERGARTNERS HAD GARLANDS OF FLOWERS IN THEIR HAIR."

each other, in order to put themselves in her position. After this little pantomime they were all the more anxious to see her and find out how she would manage.

The morning of May 29 dawned clear and blue and a divine spirit was present with us even in the weather that day. The children arrived at school at 8 o'clock as usual even though this was officially a school holiday, as that evening began the holiday of the Festival of Weeks. This holiday commemorates both the giving of the Ten Commandments and the offering of the first fruits to the temple. In honor of our famous guest and of the holiday the children were dressed mostly in white, and the little kindergartners had garlands of flowers in their hair. Some of the older girls carried bouquets of flowers which they hoped to be able to give to Miss Keller.

Promptly at 8:30 a.m. our distinguished guest and her entourage arrived. They parked their car on the main street and proceeded on foot down the path to the

school building where the children were standing in two rows to greet them. The children were completely surprised to see Miss Keller walking down our rocky path with just the slightest assistance from Miss Thomson. Along the path is a pepper tree at which she stopped to smell of its fragrance, and then she walked between the rows of children, greeting them with "Shalom" (Hello). We had told the children that she knew no Hebrew. But when they read "Shalom" coming from her lips they looked at their teachers with that all-knowing expression of a child who catches his teacher in an error.

A brief speech of welcome was delivered by our director Dr. Zaliouk and then one of our little kindergartners presented Miss Keller with a bouquet of flowers. After thanking little Julie, kissing her on both cheeks and commenting on her braids and hair ribbons, Miss Keller rapturously exclaimed, "Carnations—How lovely!" And indeed it was a huge bouquet of carnations.

(See "Keller," page 396)

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tion. When such interference exists, the hearing aid may be turned down a little, but it should never be turned completely off. A voice should be able to attract the attention of the listener. It should be remembered that a person with normal hearing cannot turn off his hearing except as his mind shuts out those sounds he does not need to hear.

7. Practice at work will depend upon the nature of what the trainee does. If he works in a boiler factor where even normal hearing is inadequate, the instrument should not be worn. Also, it should not be worn if there is the possibility that it might be broken. If work is in an office, listening should progress to the more difficult situations in which several persons are talking and even in the presence of some background noise.

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Keller

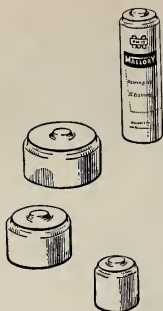
(From page 378)

tions, one of the flowers which grow profusely in Israel at this season of the year.

One of the senior girls then presented to our esteemed guest a scroll with a biblical quotation upon it, and a basket of flowers and vegetables symbolic of the dual significance of the holiday eve upon which she visited us. The following words written on the scroll were read in both Hebrew and English:

Your friends the deaf children of the Institute for the Deaf in Haifa, Israel, bless you upon your visit to us and our land with the blessing of a long and happy life. May the words of the prophet Isaiah be realized: "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight . . . Hear ye deaf and look ye blind that ye may see." (Isaiah 42, 16-18.)

Miss Keller's face lit up with joy, and she again surprised the children by saying "Todah" (thank you), upon receipt of these gifts. She insisted upon guessing the contents of the basket of "bikurim" (first fruit offerings). These flowers and vege-



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tables the children themselves had grown in our school garden. Our children were quite impressed by Miss Keller's tactile sense, for by handling a new potato she immediately told what it was. The cucumber, radish, and flowers she recognized by their odors.

Miss Keller then asked for permission to speak a few words. Miss Polly Thomson, Miss Keller's secretary-companion, repeated the remarks and they were translated into Hebrew by our director, Dr. Zaliouk. Those of us who understood English were amazed at the facility of Miss Keller's speech, which was almost completely understandable. She thanked the children for their gifts and first fruit offerings and told them how she feels for them that they cannot hear. "But," she said, "you can see the sky, stars, and birds, and you can love them and be happy. Some things are hard for you because you cannot hear. But believe me, I was never sorry that I learned to speak, and your teachers believe that you can acquire speech. I want you to work hard on your articulation and justify the faith of your teachers in your powers. If you do it, it will be your proudest accomplishment and you will lift a banner for the deaf who come after you. Shalom."

After posing for pictures and a short visit to the school building where she observed a kindergarten acoustic training lesson and signed our guest book, Miss Keller left with "Shalom" and "Todah." The children then broke from their lines and surrounded her, trying to grasp her hands and kiss her, pressing their flowers to her.

Helen Keller combines within her person the enthusiasm of youth and the appearance of a prophet. Her visit to our school and land may have been brief in time, but the impression she has left, not only with our children and staff, but with the many hundreds of people she talked to throughout this country, will be everlasting.

Molly

(From page 372)

I introduced a friend to him, saying, "This is Miss Anderson, from Australia." "What province?" asked Tad. He placed his hand on Miss Anderson's face, and she replied, "Melbourne, Victoria." "Oh yes,"

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